



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

**Bushwick Leaders' High School for Academic
Excellence**

High School 556

**797 Bushwick Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11221**

Principal: Catherine Reilly

Dates of review: May 10 – 11, 2007

Reviewer: Maggie Hollingsworth

Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall evaluation

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Bushwick Leaders' High School for Academic Excellence is a neighborhood school that draws most of its students from the Bushwick district of East Brooklyn. It has 395 students enrolled in grades 9 through 12, 86% of whom are Hispanic, 16% are Black and 4% are from other groups. Fifty six per cent of students are female and 44% are male. Special education students represent 13% of the enrollment and English language learners, 20%. Eighty seven percent of students are Title 1 eligible, which is higher than for City schools as a whole. Latest figures indicate an 88.4% attendance rate which is higher than for similar schools and for City schools as a whole. Until this year teacher turnover has been high but there is now more stability than previously. Three quarters of the teaching staff are new to the profession.

Since the school opened in 2003 it has occupied two different sites, moving this school year into its current premises. Though much refurbishment has been done, the school still lacks an auditorium, science laboratories and suitable sports facilities.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is trusted and highly respected by the learning community.
- Students are very well cared for and are encouraged to have an active voice in all school matters.
- The school runs smoothly and is a safe place to learn.
- The enthusiasm, energy and commitment of staff reflect the principal's firm commitment to distributive leadership.
- Teamwork and collaboration are strengths of the school.
- Very good communication between staff, students, parents and the school's partners ensures that everyone understands the school's mission and that students have the best chance to succeed.
- The school monitors student achievement regularly and carefully fine-tunes schedules and curricula to meet the students' needs.
- Staff use data particularly well to track the progress of students who are in the greatest need.
- Where the teaching is differentiated, the students' engagement is high and they learn securely.
- Strong and productive partnerships with outside agencies have brought many benefits to the whole school community.

What the school needs to improve

- Analyze more closely the differential achievement of boys and girls.
- Extend the use of data to compare the school's performance with other schools.
- Ensure that teachers have consistent expectations of students' work and behavior from classroom to classroom.
- Make more use of differentiated teaching in lessons so that the work is better matched to students' needs.
- Increase the level of expertise in teaching English as a second language for all instructional staff.
- Devise interim goals and specific timeframes in school action plans.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The school will see its first cohort graduate in a few weeks. Most of these students entered in 2003 as over-the-counter registrants who had not secured places elsewhere. Many of these students have exceeded the school's initial expectations, have passed Regents and are going to college. They have benefited from the strong leadership of the principal and the close care and attention that teachers, working as a team, give them. Teachers use assessment data to monitor students' progress assiduously, following up those who fall behind with a network of support. Through their energy and determination, the school is a safe place to develop and to learn.

The school is remarkable for the way in which it works in partnership with its learning community, and, in particular, with the way the principal has mobilized support from its partner organizations. This support has benefited students and their parents, bringing in additional resources and expertise that have made a difference to the quality of education the school provides.

Although the school recognizes the progress it has made from its inception, it understands that there is still a lot more to do to secure consistency in instructional quality and in classroom management, to analyze the detail of data and to compare results with other schools.

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school collects and analyses a wealth of data and uses it effectively to assess the wide range of needs of students. Subject teachers keep running records of student achievement in tests, quizzes and formal examinations, checking gaps in the students' knowledge and understanding and amending instruction where the data shows this is needed. In English and mathematics, for example, teachers make a detailed analysis of the students' performance in mock tests prior to Regents so that they can address the shortcomings in good time before the examination. All students are assigned to an advisory class specific to their grade, level and gender and meet their advisor daily. Advisors know the students very well and make good use of information about their achievement, progress, attendance and behavior in these meetings to keep students on track with their academic program. The system is effective because the school is small and staff readily and regularly share information, but staff recognize that, as the school grows, this process will need to be established more formally. The school's extensive achievement data bank is computerized and enables staff to quickly identify which students are falling behind, and by how much. The school does not yet benefit from its full potential because, although it includes formal test scores, it does not cover other information such as teachers' interim assessments and attendance records.

The principal and her instructional cabinet analyze the performance of students in different subjects, classes and grades. They also compare the performance of students from different ethnic groups, and of English language learners and special education students and have a clear picture of how they are achieving in comparison with other groups. The school understands from its analysis that, as a group, boys do less well than girls, although as yet the analysis is not fully developed to establish why this might be, and how the differences could be remedied. As a new school, the focus has been to compare results of each cohort with its predecessor rather than with other schools, but with the first generation of students about to graduate, the school recognizes the need to widen the scope of these comparisons.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student’s next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student’s learning.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

Teamwork is a strength of the school. Staff work together closely to evaluate students’ progress and plan next steps. Instructional teams are based together so that information from different subject teachers and from special education and English as a second language can be easily shared at regular faculty meetings. The daily advisory period is a key element of the school’s strategy for monitoring students’ progress and keeping the students on target, the advisor acting as a conduit for information from a variety of teachers. The students value advisory periods which let them know how well they have done, prepare them for what is coming up and teach them what to expect from tests. The system works effectively because the students’ progress is always under review and teachers use their intuition as well as the data to understand what is needed in the longer term. The school is, however less practiced at setting clear, precise interim goals for achievement. While the Comprehensive Education Plan is a working document and guides planning in the medium term, it lacks short term goals and time lines.

The school is developing a culture of hard work. Teachers make much of students’ successful applications to college and expect students to aim high. The ‘Advancement Via Individual Determination’ (AVID) program, is for example, providing a group of grade 9 students with new challenges, and the school’s place in the world final of the Odyssey of the Mind competition has created a buzz of excitement among staff and students. The school’s only advanced placement course, in Spanish, has achieved 100% success rate, encouraging a wider participation next year and paving the way for a further advanced course in literature. Much is expected of the students’ participation in school life, too. They have an influential voice in school matters through their involvement in the student government, the hiring of new teachers and through active membership of the school leadership team. Students are encouraged to try out new experiences, such residential visits and college trips which broaden their horizons.

All members of the school community understand the school’s goals and expectations and the different groups are well represented on a variety of committees. The school works hard to actively involve parents in supporting its goals through parent information meetings, workshops in general education and classes for learners of English. Through its close partnership with a major financial institution the school has also been able to offer parent finance workshops. The broader appeal of these workshops has opened the school’s doors to a much wider group of parents and other family members.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The school aligns its curriculum with the mandated curriculum. Its capacity to deliver key elements of science is, however, limited by the lack of a science laboratory and likewise, the limited on-site sports facilities mean that only a small range of sports can be offered. As a small school, the number of enrichment classes and electives is not as great as the students would wish but the school does its best to extend the range by adopting a rotating schedule and providing evening and Saturday courses to enable students to make up credits. Within the parameters set by its size the school adopts the most flexible schedule it can, responding to student needs by altering class sizes and creating double periods where the students would benefit from this. Skilled scheduling matches the skills of staff to the needs of students wherever possible, for example by ensuring that all mathematics lessons are double staffed to enable collaborative team teaching.

The principal's good financial management, powers of persuasion and ability to prioritize have enabled the school to stretch its finances to meet the needs of its expanding population while providing funds for additional trips, visits and residential courses. The use of laptop computers and other technology, donated recently via one of the school’s partners, have already begun to enhance students’ learning in some subjects. The school’s goals include a significant expansion in the use of this technology in the near future.

The teachers are held accountable for the students’ achievement through regular meetings with the principal or a member of the instructional cabinet. Teachers enjoy learning about pedagogy from each other and choose to observe and critique each other’s lessons as part of this process. Classroom instruction varies in the degree to which it engages students’ interest, but when teachers differentiate resources, for example for students working individually, the students are willing, lively and co-operative. The school has an appropriate code of discipline which students understand and accept, but within classrooms teachers set their own rules. This leads to inconsistencies in expectations of behavior between classrooms which are unhelpful to students’ learning. Attendance is a high priority and absence is swiftly followed up by an immediate telephone call. The students feel safe in the school and know that their advisor will always go the extra mile to help them with a problem. In addition, ‘at risk’ students have an assigned mentor who provides one to one counseling to keep them on target.

Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school’s work is well developed.

The school’s rapid expansion has created openings for new teachers each year. The school has been increasingly proactive in filling these vacancies, adopting a rigorous hiring policy that includes seeking the opinions of the staff and students. This has ensured that staff are fully committed to the school’s goals and subscribe to its collaborative approaches. Though mainly new to teaching, most staff are enthusiastic and energetic. Under the principal’s leadership they take on new roles eagerly and shoulder

responsibilities exceptionally effectively. As a result the school runs smoothly. The principal's philosophy of 'growing your own' has reaped many benefits. She is trusted and well respected by the whole school community.

The program of staff development takes into account the school's needs as well as the needs of teachers. Eight teachers have, for example, attended a course on teaching English as a second language to enable them to better meet the needs of English language learners, and there are plans to include more instructional staff in similar initiatives. The staff have discussed using data in their instructional programs and are eager to do more of this. Several teachers undertaking masters' degrees have a focus on data as part of an action research study in the school. The principal regularly observes classrooms and uses her findings to identify the support that teachers need. Teachers meet, plan and observe each other teaching, and give each other feedback. This helps to share ideas and good practice among staff, almost three quarters of whom are probationary teachers. Because the school is small, there is no common planning time within the schedule but teachers readily attend sessions after school and plan together during the weekly afternoon faculty meeting time.

A wide range of partnerships with church, community, financial and arts organizations, has enabled the school to enrich its resources and curriculum for students, involve more parents in its work and bolster the morale of the school community. The school benefits richly from these links and uses them wisely in initiatives to raise the achievement of students.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

The goals in the school's Comprehensive Education Plan are well-defined and agreed in a collaborative process that involves the whole school community. Progress towards these goals is formally reviewed at meetings of the senior leadership team, but informally and much more regularly at cabinet meetings which give instructional staff a powerful voice.

The goals are clearly defined, identify responsibilities, and drive the school's activities. While interim targets and time lines are not specified, the school's progress towards the end goal is the subject of frequent discussion in faculty meetings so that teachers understand their role in meeting them. When data on student achievement suggests that a target may not be met by individuals or groups of students, staff are encouraged to suggest ideas and decide what actions need to be taken to get the plan quickly back on track. The principal's close monitoring of outcomes, conducted in an open and consultative way, provides her with a very clear view of the impact of initiatives and detailed information about the school's strengths and areas for development.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Bushwick Leaders' High School for Academic Excellence (HS 556)	∅	✓	+
Quality Score		X	
Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> each student, classroom, grade level, 		X	
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students* 		X	
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> all other categories of interest to the school* 		X	
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 1		X	

* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.		X	
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject, and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area.		X	
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.		X	
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.		X	
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 2		X	

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.		X	
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			X
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.		X	
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.			X
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3		X	
Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.			X
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.		X	
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.		X	
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.			X
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.		X	
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.		X	
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.		X	
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.			X
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X